

INTER - OFFICE MEMORANDUM

August 10, 2006

TO:

Margo Wheeler, Director
Planning and Development

FROM:

Courtney Mooney, Historic Preservation
Officer
Planning and Development

SUBJECT:

SDR 15043
Historic Preservation Officer comments

COPIES TO:

Steve Swanton, Senior Planner
Planning and Development

The following comments are in response to the proposed two-story commercial building to be constructed at 400 – 416 S. Seventh, within the Las Vegas High School Historic District. On August 1, 2006, I met with the applicants to discuss their proposal and my recommendations. I explained the background of the neighborhood and that the Planning and Development Department would like the applicant to consider keeping the historic homes in tact, while building additions to the rear of the property. The applicants stated that this was not an option. I then suggested several possible variations to the style and façade of the building that would make it more residential in nature and architecturally compatible with the neighborhood. Again, the applicants stated that most of these suggestions were not an option due to space and/or cost limitations.

HPO Recommendation**DENIAL****Background**

The subject site includes four parcels within the Las Vegas High School Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the United States' official list of historic places worthy of preservation because they are historically, architecturally, or archeologically significant. The National Register listing recognizes the significance of properties and districts within a community, and provides a limited degree of protection from the effects of federally funded, licensed, or permitted activities.

Properties listed on the National Register do not fall under the jurisdiction of the city of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) design review process whereby the HPC approves or disapproves major changes that are planned for the district. However, because the district is listed on the National Register, the Planning and Development Department has worked with the HPC to identify the significant architectural and streetscape elements that define the unique character of the district. The typical character-defining elements include one-story, residential homes built from the early 1930s through the 1940s. The styles of the original homes are typically early Revival styles such as Tudor, Spanish and Colonial, and several Ranch style examples.

Historic Significance

400 and 408 S. Seventh Street are two historic homes that are located on two of the four parcels included in this proposal. Both of these homes are considered to be “contributing elements,” meaning, they retain their architectural integrity and context within the historic neighborhood.

400 S. Seventh was built in 1937 in a traditional Ranch style and was the home of Dr. John R. McDaniel until around 1960. Dr. McDaniel was one of the first doctors to join the staff of the Las Vegas Hospital. In 1932 the Las Vegas Hospital Association opened a Boulder City operation in connection with the construction of Hoover Dam, McDaniel was placed in charge there. After the completion of the dam, McDaniel became Boulder City’s public health officer and in 1941, he became the president-elect of the Nevada State Medical Association.

408 S. Seventh was built in 1931 in a modest Spanish Revival style. The home is considered significant for its link with prominent businessman and civic leader Robert B. Griffith, and later with pioneer Las Vegas and newspaper owner Charles “Pop” Squires.

Griffith was an important figure in Southern Nevada real estate. His most notable venture was the development of Mt. Charleston into a resort area. He also served as Postmaster and President of the Chamber of Commerce. He lived in the house until the 1940s.

Squires was the second owner of the house, and was one of the most important men in the history of Las Vegas. He arrived in 1905 and built the first hotel in the Clark Townsite. He bought the Las Vegas Age from T.J. Nichols, and published that for many years. He was an influential member of the Colorado River Commission, a tireless Las Vegas booster, and worked to get Boulder Dam for the area. He lived in the house until the mid-1950s.

Analysis

Recent reviews by the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office have suggested that the Las Vegas High School Historic District is at risk for losing its recognition by the National Register due to significant inappropriate new development. The Planning Department and the Historic Preservation Officer (HPO) strongly encourage sensitive and contextual design within the neighborhood to preserve its historic character and integrity, with the priority being to preserve the original homes in their original state. When this is proven to be infeasible, the HPO recommends that the applicant maintain as much of the existing historic building façade as possible with any necessary additions built onto the rear of the existing structure, thereby keeping the one-story streetscape intact.

The proposed project includes raising 408 S. Seventh and placing it on top of the new building. This is by no means considered historic preservation, as it completely removes the one-story Spanish Revival style home and places it 30’ above the ground on top of an Italianate commercial building.

The new design for these parcels has been determined by the City of Las Vegas Historic Preservation Officer to be incompatible with the historic neighborhood for the following reasons:

- The building scale is incompatible with existing residential scale of the historic neighborhood.
- The relatively flat façade has little variation in terms of noticeably recessed planes that would provide a more residential appearance.
- The grand two-story entrance is inconsistent with existing historic homes.
- The Italianate design of the building does not reference any existing historic style of the Las Vegas High School neighborhood, nor was this a popular design within any residential or commercial district in Las Vegas during this era.
- The proposed setbacks are incompatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The new design is considered incompatible according to the City of Las Vegas Commercial Development guidelines for the following reasons:

- The building is incompatible with the scale of development allowed for the surrounding area.